



Friends
of
MINNETONKA
PARKS

ANNUAL REPORT

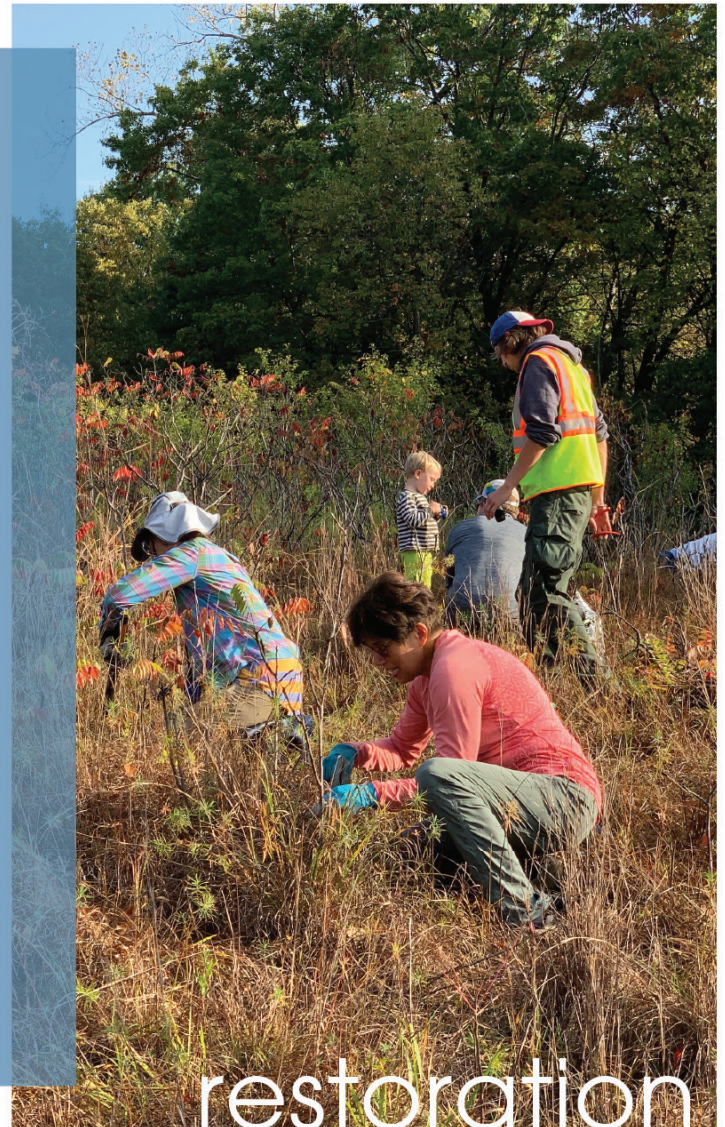
2021





Executive Summary

The Friends of Minnetonka Parks (FoMP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization composed of supporters of Minnetonka, which has a goal of collaborating with the City on park and natural spaces restoration. We are individuals and volunteers who live, work, or recreate in Minnetonka, who value our city's unique natural amenities, and who care about restoring them by removing invasive species and proposing and working on projects that will enhance and protect the parks from further degradation.



restoration

We have been an organization for just eleven months, but we have had a banner year (even in a pandemic). With dozens of restoration and other events, over a thousand hours of volunteer time, and nine formal proposals submitted to the Natural Resources division for 2022, we are off to a great start. The city, too, has shown their interest by beginning a formal volunteer management system and also a proposal submission process: two important parts of a successful partnership between a volunteer organization and city staff. We look forward to collaborating on the development of both.

Minnetonka's park system is a key reason that people move to the area. Most residents live within a short walk or drive to a park, where they may enjoy both organized and nature-based activities. But our parks have become overrun with invasive species such as buckthorn and garlic mustard, and others have areas taken over by aggressive species that will eventually claim restored prairies. City staff have worked for years to combat these invasive trees and plants, but with only one restoration specialist (plus a few seasonal employees and fragmented volunteering), it has been impossible to stay ahead of the spread. FoMP hopes to turn the tide by providing volunteers and project plans for at least 10 parks. Please read our *By the Numbers* section on the next page, along with our longer Annual Report which follows. If you have questions, please email us at mtkaparks@gmail.com.



By the Numbers





FoMP History and Formation



park tours

Friends of Minnetonka Parks is a volunteer consortium of people who live, work, or recreate in Minnetonka parks, including Big Willow, Cullen Nature Preserve, Jidana, Hilloway, Minnehaha Creek Headwaters, Lake Rose, Lone Lake, Meadow, Purgatory, Shady Oak, and Victoria-Evergreen. This report is the first annual report of our organization, which coalesced at the beginning of 2021. We have accomplished a great deal in one year and look forward to continuing this momentum.

Several members of FoMP have a long history of volunteering in Minnetonka's park system. We connected during the lengthy controversy surrounding the mountain bike trail in Lone Lake Park, and soon realized that we could put our energy for park restoration into a wider effort that could improve many more of the city's parks. We began by gathering a larger group together to discuss what a broader consortium might attempt to accomplish.

We formally introduced FoMP to the Park Board in a brief presentation on March 3, 2021.

We then embarked on surveying over 200 residents, beginning with our neighbors and other known park volunteers and expanding to general park users whom we met in the parks. Our purpose in conducting the survey was to engage residents informally to gather information about their perceptions of the state of our parks, their concerns, and their suggestions. We knew the city staff would be writing two updated plans: the Park, Open Space, and Trail Plan (POST) and the Natural Resources Master Plan (NRMP) in the coming months, and we wanted to offer on-the-ground qualitative data to contribute to the public engagement process. A major finding from our survey was that although residents love and value our parks, they are worried about the declining state of the natural amenities due to invasive plants, overuse, and lack of resources to restore the parks. We reported on these results to the Park Board on June 2, 2021.



We spent the summer educating our park leaders about each of the parks in Minnetonka by conducting tours. Each park leader provided some history about the park, walked us through key areas, and discussed restoration needs. We invited city council members and park board members, and some members did walk with us. In all, we toured 11 local parks, and also toured Terrace Oaks Park in Burnsville to learn about their large oak savanna restoration.

Additionally, we organized several volunteer events, which we discuss in a later section of this report. Finally, we have proposed individual park plans to city staff for 2022, following the procedure that they requested and priorities outlined in the Natural Resources Management Plan. We hope to get those projects going in the spring and continue to increase our volunteer base.

Throughout our organizational meetings, our founding members discussed the pros and cons of organizing as a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Consideration was given to the City's 1997 Natural Resources Stewardship Program Plan seeking to partner with a 501(c)(3) versus the inability of non-profits to endorse candidates. Our conclusion was that the ability to raise funds for all parks under one entity (rather than each individual park group) and eligibility to apply for grants most closely fit our mission. Further, people would be more likely to donate to our restoration projects if they could deduct their contribution on their tax returns. One of our members had recently founded a non-profit for the shareholders of their employer and volunteered to coordinate the effort. We also saw strength in numbers. With FoMP, our individual parks groups can tap into the volunteer availability of other groups, help each other by offering a consistent approach with city staff, and coordinate our efforts so as not to compete with each other. As a result, we have provided the city with volunteer buckthorn removal "blitzes" in numbers beyond their imaginations. We hope to continue this trend with significant and meaningful projects for each of the friends of parks groups that will launch the city of Minnetonka into a productive restoration mode.

Restore Minnetonka!

fundraising

\$938

in-kind donations
incorporating

\$1000

fundraised

\$986

in-kind donations
restoration

Though we've not yet had a fundraising drive, FoMP has raised \$750 from cash plus \$250 in donations receivable from Facebook toward establishing our non-profit and currently has \$675 of cash on hand. Further, members have contributed \$938.37 of in-kind contributions relating to incorporating under Minnesota Statute 317A, FoMP's IRS non-profit tax determination; establishing our website; advertising buckthorn blitzes and purchasing supplies such as business cards and checks. Members have also contributed \$986 for in-kind restoration needs such as native seed for park projects.

We are a volunteer organization and intend to maintain low overhead costs. Fundraising, aside from our plans for 2022, is generally anticipated to focus on park-specific restoration projects.



Board of Directors

Executive

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CULLEN &
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Cindy Eyden
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Jerrold Gershone
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VICTORIA-EVERGREEN

Mary Hammill
MEADOW

Sally Wahlburg
MEADOW

Sabrina Harvey
HILLOWAY

Dennis Yockers
MINNEHAHA CREEK



Vision



We envision a park system that honors and builds on our city's heritage of preserving, restoring and managing our distinctive high-value natural spaces that enhance Minnetonka's quality of life and distinguish it from other cities.

Mission

Our mission is to work with the City of Minnetonka to ensure that all park visitors can experience high-quality, biodiverse places that provide a multitude of positive nature-based interactions, thereby improving the quality of life and the sustainability and ecological resiliency of our parks, park system and community.

We will accomplish this by:

- investing in the restoration of our parks and preserving the park system's ecologically-significant areas because natural landscapes in a suburban context require ongoing management to maintain their ecological quality,
- transforming degraded landscapes to high-quality, biodiverse ecological plant communities,
- educating park visitors that the investment in and restoration of our natural resources provides the community with a distinctive amenity,
- growing the size and involvement of friends groups to assist with education, restoration and preservation activities,
- helping to streamline communication with the city to coordinate and manage volunteer restoration activities, and celebrating the outcomes.



Values

We value a park system that:

- is inclusive for all residents,
- is sustainable both financially and environmentally,
- anticipates, funds, and plans for climate change effects,
- provides both active and passive recreational opportunities,
- facilitates a long-term investment in the restoration, management and preservation of our natural resources as a defining and distinctive characteristic of our city, and
- communicates, monitors and enforces clear expectations and rules for use so that everyone is respectful and feels safe and welcome.



sustainable and resilient natural amenities

We consider our natural landscapes to be an amenity that can be enjoyed and appreciated by everyone, and also needs to be protected from negligence, misuse, overuse, and overt or benign degradation. Each park and/or preserve in the city may have its own unique, natural, biodiverse features and should have its own unique restoration management plan and guidelines for use guided by a comprehensive, city wide vision and plan for our park system.



Our Work in 2021



Website

Behind the scenes we have created a robust website at www.mtkaparks.org. Not only does it provide links to each of the parks in which we volunteer, it also has a Resources section to help educate our members and the general public about restoration (not public yet at this writing). This is a dynamic site, which will change and grow as our work continues.

Social Media Presence

We created a Facebook page at www.facebook.com/mtkaparks to help advertise our volunteer events and promote our parks to the community. It has been an important part of our campaign to increase both visibility and membership. We also have an Instagram page at www.instagram.com/mtkaparks that we will be using selectively to showcase the beauty of Minnetonka's natural amenities.

Contact Us

We also have an email at which interested parties may contact us: mtkaparks@gmail.com



Work Plan for 2022

Volunteer Framework

We have many items on our 2022 to-do list. First, we are optimistic that staff will include FoMP in the creation of a volunteer framework, just as staff included other groups in creating MOUs. We look forward to clear roles and responsibilities so that we can do our best to support and restore our parks in the coming years in a collaborative relationship with Minnetonka's Natural Resources staff. Second, we will follow up on the individual park proposals so that we know what volunteer events we need to organize over the season. We will keep in touch with the Park Board by attending or watching meetings and communicating as needed. We have plans to present spotlights on selected parks during winter meetings.

Education and Outreach

We will continue work on our website's Resources section so that they can be used immediately in the spring. We see education as an important role for our group, and we will be assisting with training for new volunteers, and participating in our own further knowledge base as leaders.



We will reach out to other possible partners in our community, such as scout troops, Minnesota Master Naturalists, and faith communities to see how we might collaborate. We also will seek funding for projects that exceed the city's budget so that funding restrictions will not hinder restoration efforts.

Habitat Restoration

We look forward to future events. We may consider a seed exchange, bare root trees and shrubs sale, or a member drive event. We certainly will plan for the volunteer events in the warm months, per our approved park projects and future projects.